

**Welcome remarks by Hon. Rohitha Bogollagama**  
**Minister for Foreign Affairs**  
**“Financing Strategies for Healthcare”, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

Hon. Prime Minister, **Ratnasiri Wickremanayake**,  
Hon. Nimal Siripala de Silva, Minister of Healthcare and Nutrition,  
Distinguished Ministers,  
Representatives from UNDESA and WHO  
Excellencies, Representatives of UN Agencies, Distinguished Delegates,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Colombo to the “Regional Ministerial Meeting on Financing Strategies for Healthcare”. I am particularly pleased to see participation from such a wide spectrum of stake-holders relevant to this meeting, including distinguished Ministers, Senior Officials, Representatives of UN Secretariat and agencies, Multilateral Organizations, NGOs and the Private Sector. This broad-based participation will enable us to address, from several perspectives, the challenges related to the subject of this Regional Meeting, the objective of which is to realize the health-related MDGS for the benefit of our people. I welcome in particular the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar, Minister of Health of Maldives, Minister of Finance of Bhutan and the Deputy Ministers of Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan and who have taken time off their busy schedules to gather here in Colombo.

This meeting is organized under the framework of Annual Ministerial Review process of the Economic Social Council of the UN. The primary responsibility for overseeing progress in the achievement of the MDG's by

the year 2015 devolves on the ECOSOC, and the Annual Ministerial Review process was established to monitor our progress in this regard. The theme for Review at Ministerial level at the ECOSOC in July this year is how we can work together to achieve the internationally agreed goals and commitments regarding global public health. Sri Lanka is pleased to work in close partnership with the United Nations in this process, and we wish to express our appreciation to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), for their cooperation and support in organizing this meeting. I also wish to thank the Governments of Japan and Italy for their support. We also appreciate the support given by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP).

The Ministerial review is not only a process of international collaboration, but primarily a process involving domestic stake-holders, in close collaboration at national and sub-national level. In Sri Lanka, we have established an extensive preparatory process involving partnership with the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition and the Ministry of Finance, as well as a number of academics, think-tanks and NGO's dealing with the practical, and policy aspects of delivering and improving healthcare. I wish to thank the Ministries of Finance and Healthcare, and relevant stakeholders for their support.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentleman,

Sri Lanka was early among developing countries to understand the importance of investing in human resources, gender equality and social development. In Sri Lanka, a large share of public expenditure has been

distributed to households over the years in the form of free education, health services, food subsidies and subsidized credit with a view to improving living standards and ensuring minimum consumption levels especially in rural areas. This was considered an investment in the people, rather than an expense. Over the years, we have received good returns on our investment in human capital. Our health and social indicators continue to be well above those in comparable developing countries. Our life expectancy is high and our literacy rates for men and women hover above 90%. We have almost achieved universal primary education for both males and females. Overall, Sri Lanka is on track in achieving the MDG targets for most of the social indicators and some have been already achieved at national level.

Sri Lanka is particularly pleased to host the Regional Meeting related to healthcare, in view of our achievements in this sector, and our own experience in successfully providing universal coverage to our population. Today we can proudly say that we have been successful in eliminating diseases such as polio, leprosy and measles, and other communicable diseases and effectively controlled malaria. Our infant mortality rate is low, and the maternal mortality rate of 1.4 per 10,000 live births in 2002 is considered an exceptional achievement for a developing country. Sri Lanka's immunization programme is considered one of the most effective in the region, and has succeeded in controlling or eliminating all vaccine preventable diseases. We have reached near universal immunization against measles, while the level of HIV/AIDS prevalence is low.

This has been the result of deliberate policy orientation and resource allocation by successive governments since independence.

The government role in ensuring efficient and effective healthcare has been maintained not only in normal times but also in situations of crisis and conflict as demonstrated in our post –tsunami experience, as well as in the conflict affected north and East of the country. Emergency health facilities were effectively maintained in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami in which much of the coastal infrastructure including hospitals were destroyed. No outbreaks of disease or epidemic took place, and the needs of the affected population were effectively catered by the government health infrastructure and personnel.

Distinguished delegates,

During more than two decades of combating terrorism in the North and East of Sri Lanka, the Government continues to effectively deliver healthcare facilities to the civilians in these parts. Even in the areas which are held by the force of arms by the LTTE, all health infrastructure, including hospitals , medicines , doctors, nurses and healthcare personnel are maintained and paid through the funds allocated by the Government, since the inception of the conflict . This healthcare infrastructure has been maintained despite the well-known fact that much of these supplies and facilities are used by the LTTE for their own cadres. The regular dispatch of medical provisions to the these areas by land, air and sea routes is a challenging and risk-ridden operation, and its continuation for over two decades demonstrates our commitment to looking after the health related humanitarian needs of the civilians. These efforts continue to date, with the

efforts concentrated on ensuring the evacuation of patients from among the population still held captive by the LTTE in the very small area to which they are now confined. The highest priority has also been accorded to the provision of healthcare to the approximately 36,000 civilians and displaced persons in Vavuniya, who have escaped from the LTTE.

Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen,

Financing for healthcare as well as the broader issue of achieving the MDG'S is an even greater challenge to all of us as a result of adverse global developments since the adoption of these Goals. This includes global crises in the food, energy and environment sectors and most recently the pressing challenges arising from the global financial crisis. Food, nutrition and physical health are closely linked. Energy costs adversely impact on people's access to food and nutrition. The financial crisis has resulted in the reduction of wealth globally, affecting both individuals and governments. These adverse developments also impact negatively on the progress of developing countries towards achieving the IADG's including the MDG's. As a developing country Sri Lanka has made much progress, yet much more need to be done.

In today's globalized world, where national economies are closely integrated with global currents, national efforts alone cannot eradicate poverty and hunger, ensure food and nutrition security, and universal healthcare coverage. We need assistance and we need to create an enabling international environment, and we need to develop a global partnership to address the many relevant issues - a global partnership with governments at the centre, but with the support of donors, UN and

multilateral financial Institutions, business communities, private sector, academics and civil society, all working together.

Hon. Prime Minister and distinguished delegates,

This forum illustrates once again the close engagement between Sri Lanka and the international community, in facing common challenges in our development agenda. In our national experience, this has been a valued collaboration in the ongoing development process, as well as in facing crisis situations and emergencies.

I am confident that you will have a successful and thought provoking discussion and I wish you a pleasant stay in Sri Lanka.

I thank you.

